

Kingston Federation of Allotment Gardeners

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Working together for Kingston's allotments

Councillors Take a Special Interest in Allotments

Kingston Councillors Penny Shelton and Marc Woodall are taking a special interest in the Borough's allotment sites managed by Quadron Services. They would like to see more allotments available to people who want them as current waiting lists remain high for all of the sites. Marc is an allotment holder himself and Penny supported Kingston Road Allotment Association earlier this year when they set up the on-line petition on the Council's website about the new tenancy agreement. They now attend the regular meetings with KFAG, RBK and Quadron to discuss allotment matters. In the future they hope to be included in management 'walk rounds', which will be advertised on Quadron managed sites, to discuss any issues with ploholders.

Concerns about Let but Unworked Plots

The number of let but unworked plots on Quadron managed sites is a worry to many ploholders, particularly with waiting lists so high.

Some SLVs are also concerned that the change in the billing date for plot rent from January to April could result in the loss of a growing season on plots where the tenants eventually decide to

give up. Often the decision to give up a plot is triggered by the receipt of the rent demand, particularly when a ploholder has been struggling to cope with an allotment. If this decision is not made until April it gives little opportunity for a new person to prepare a plot for the coming growing season and could result in the land not being used for months with subsequent deterioration.

Earlier in the year one SLV contacted Quadron Services and said that "While the change to coincide with the LA financial year will make sense from the Council's perspective, and from yours, it pays scant regard to the growing season. Effective use of Nature's growing cycles requires that plots be let and relet at the earliest possible date in the calendar year, to enable new gardeners to take advantage of early spring conditions". He went on to suggest an Autumn initiative to identify ploholders intending to give up their plots.



Autumn Squash

KFAG raised these matters at a meeting with the Council and Quadron and it was agreed that scheduled twice yearly plot inspections are to be carried out with the SLVs. Ploholders would be notified that inspections are to be held on a regular basis, probably in autumn and spring. It is hoped that these site inspections will deal with the problems of let but unworked plots and identify ploholders who are planning to give up anyway. Mark Garthwaite of Quadron Services will be contacting all SLVs to discuss the arrangements.

Councils look to Voluntary Management for Allotment Sites to Cut Costs

Since January of this year KFAG has been contacted by council officers from 3 neighbouring boroughs seeking information and advice on voluntary management, we have held meetings with 2 of them.

The councils say that with the current popularity of allotment gardening and a move to smaller plot sizes the workload and administration costs have increased considerably. They have been quite frank that the alternative will be rent increases. With Councils throughout the country trying to find ways to cut their spending, voluntary management by a ploholders association is seen as an effective

way to reduce costs. There are reports from around the country of substantial rent increases: Greenwich now charges £130 per year for a 'full' (10 rod) plot and Wandsworth a staggering £165!

Joan McConn of K FAG recently attended an Allotments Regeneration Initiative meeting for representatives of London allotment federations, she reports that in many Boroughs allotment sites are being approached by their Councils and asked to consider V.M. in an effort to keep down costs.

The Federation fully agrees that V.M. is a cost effective way to manage sites but the main advantages to allotment holders are an efficiently managed site, run by the ploholders for the ploholders, and an opportunity to use surplus Association funds to improve the sites. Plot rent is set at the beginning of a site's 12 lease with the Council (the Council takes 25% of this sum) and under the terms of the lease any annual rise is only at the rate of inflation.

In Kingston the work involved for individual sites to get voluntary management started has been considerably simplified. Kingston Council and the Federation have agreed a fair and reasonable basic lease, available for all sites, and we are happy to provide information sheets about starting a Ploholders' Association, detailed information about V.M. and leases. We can

supply templates for ploholders' tenancy agreements with their Association and constitution examples. We are also happy to discuss these matters with any ploholders who may be interested.

With sites fully occupied with waiting lists and the full support of the Council and Quadron Services there has not been a better time to consider voluntary management.

K FAG invited to Richmond Allotments' Forum Meeting

In September K FAG was approached by David Allister, Head of Parks at Richmond Council, asking for information about voluntary management. Richmond does not currently have V.M. although all sites have a ploholders' committee with a site representative and varying levels of site responsibility for lettings etc. Regular meetings are held with the site representatives and David Allister at an Allotment Sites Forum.

Richmond is very keen, for financial reasons, to encourage its sites to become fully devolved. David was quite open about the difficulties in financing the allotment sites, particularly the cost of the administrative work involved, and he warned that they have a clear choice between devolved management and raising the rents to reduce the costs.

Dudley Hewson, Joan McConn and Gloria Wallis from the Federation met with David to discuss the issues

and they were invited to a meeting of the Richmond Allotments Sites Forum to answer ploholders' questions. This was an interesting and useful meeting; we have since been contacted by 2 sites for further information and have been invited to a Twickenham site to talk to their allotment committee members about voluntary management.

Site News

Addison Gardens Allotments held a Tea Party to celebrate the completion of their Compost Loo and the installation of a gate between the two fields of their site. Dame Jacqueline Wilson, author and former Children's Laureate, cut the ribbon on 3 April. She said "Here at Addison Gardens Allotments, where there are over 100 members, many of you wanted toilet facilities but it wasn't possible to connect to the mains. The provision of a composting toilet is an elegant and sustainable ecological solution to the problem."



Addison Gardens Compost Loo